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4109

28 AUG 1961

SNIE 11-10-61
24 August 1961

~~SECRET~~

Matthias

SPECIAL
NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE
NUMBER 11-10-61

SOVIET TACTICS IN THE BERLIN CRISIS

Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff.

Concurred in by the
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on 24 August 1961. Concurring were The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army; the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Intelligence), Department of the Navy; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; the Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff; the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Special Operations; and the Director of the National Security Agency. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB, and the Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.

DOCUMENT NO. 1
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. I
X DECLASSIFIED
CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S C
NEXT REVIEW DATE:
AUTH: HR 70-2
DATE: 4-11-81 REVIEWER: 372099

~~SECRET~~

No 372

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SOVIET TACTICS IN THE BERLIN CRISIS

THE PROBLEM

To estimate Soviet tactics in the Berlin crisis over the next few months, with particular reference to the effect on these tactics of possible developments within East Germany.

THE ESTIMATE

1. With the action of 13 August, the Communists have taken a long step toward their objectives in Berlin and have created a new political situation there. The border controls instituted on that date have met East Germany's most pressing need by reducing the refugee flow to tolerable proportions. At the same time, the division of Berlin into two separate cities has been made virtually complete, with the eastern portion all but incorporated into the GDR. Thus the Soviets, induced by the rising tide of refugees, have taken unilateral action to achieve results which they had intended to accomplish at a later date, and by different means.

2. The refugee question, however, was only one aspect of the larger problem of stabilizing the GDR, and the closing of the Berlin escape route may worsen other aspects if it leads to a further buildup of tensions within East Germany. Even apart from this, the stemming of the refugee flow will not change the USSR's view of the necessity to bolster the GDR's claims to sovereignty with a peace treaty and eventually to eject Western influence from Berlin altogether. We do not believe that the USSR has given up its intention to press for a peace treaty and a "free city." The question is whether the Soviet leaders will accelerate their movement towards these objectives, or will moderate their pace after their considerable achievements of 13 August.

3. The action in Berlin has initiated a momentum which the Soviets may wish to sustain. A wide variety of further unilateral measures is available to them. The termination of military liaison missions would be a relatively low-keyed act which might appear to the Soviets as a means of keeping events moving in their favor.[1] Another option would be to deny Allied rights to enter East Berlin, thereby carrying to its conclusion the destruction of the four-power status of that part of the city. More drastically, the East Germans might disrupt or harass civil traffic between West Berlin and the Federal Republic; most dangerous of all, interference with Allied access might begin. Politically, the USSR might choose to accelerate the timing of a peace conference and a separate treaty with the GDR.

4. Another factor which could importantly affect the USSR's timing and tactics is the increasing involvement of Soviet prestige. Khrushchev in recent weeks has reacted to the stiffening US attitude by increasing his commitment to early action. He now asserts that the issue transcends the problems of Germany and Berlin, important as these re-

[1] Under the occupation, the US, French, and British forces in West Germany presently have military missions accredited to the Soviet Commander in East Germany, who in turn has missions to the three Allied Commanders.

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main, and that the West's refusal to conclude a peace treaty represents an attempt to achieve a "strategic breakthrough" against the Bloc. In claiming a challenge to Soviet power and prestige, he wishes to convey to his opponents that the Soviet Union cannot be expected to draw back from crisis situations in which reason and prudence would appear to dictate restraint. He might decide to take new steps on Berlin which would strengthen the image of inflexible resolve.

5. In our recent estimates of the USSR's policy toward Germany and Berlin, we have regularly attributed to the Soviet leaders a confidence that they can move gradually toward their eventual objectives without incurring unacceptable risks. We have pointed to their belief that the West could probably be induced to make negotiated concessions. And we have further estimated that, if these Soviet expectations are not borne out, the USSR will move unilaterally, but still intending to proceed in such a way as to avoid at any stage unduly high risks of war.[2]

6. We believe that Soviet actions in the recent phase of the Berlin crisis do not indicate that the USSR has departed from this general approach and method. Thus we conclude that the Soviets' present intention probably is not to take further drastic action immediately, though they may undertake measures of limited scope. For example, they will probably further restrict German civil and Allied access to East Berlin, and they may embark upon a program of gradual harassments of German civil traffic to West Berlin. But rather than pose a major challenge to West Berlin itself and the Allied position there, we believe that their present preference is to let the effects of the border closure sink in and see whether the Western Powers have become more inclined to accept Soviet terms of negotiations.

7. In the absence of fairly definite proposals by the West, we think it unlikely that Khrushchev will take the initiative in formally proposing a date and other specifics for East-West negotiations. He clearly wishes to appear as the champion of negotiations, and he may throw out hints, in an effort to encourage a Western proposal, that the USSR could be persuaded to reduce its demands if a conference were arranged. If presented with a Western invitation, he would respond favorably but would undoubtedly attempt to define the task of the conference in a fashion which served Soviet interests. If the negotiations were in train toward the end of the year, he would probably postpone his deadline for a treaty. If negotiations do not materialize, we believe that the next Soviet step will be to issue invitations to their own peace conference, probably accompanied by a revised draft of a treaty applicable to both German states and providing for the declaration of a "free city" status for West Berlin. We think under these circumstances that the chances are still considerably better than even that the treaty would not be signed before the Party Congress which convenes on 17 October.

Effect of Developments in East Germany

8. Soviet tactics will be affected by a large number of factors, including the posture adopted by the West, the movement of opinion in the important uncommitted countries, and domestic developments in East Germany. We have recently examined the possibility that serious unrest might arise in East Germany and have concluded that, under most circumstances, a major eruption is unlikely;[3] here we consider how popular disturbances or an uprising might affect Soviet tactics.

9. The Soviet leaders evidently are confident of their capability for keeping discontent in check and repressing any outbreaks which might occur. If they came to feel that the chances of a general rising were becoming

[2] Our principal estimates on Soviet policy with respect to Berlin and Germany are NIE 11-4-60, "Main Trends in Soviet Capabilities and Policies, 1960–1965," dated 1 December 1960, paragraphs 161–164, TOP SECRET; NIE 11-7-61, "Soviet Short-Term Intentions Regarding Berlin and Germany," dated 25 April 1961, SECRET; and SNIE 2-2-61, "Soviet and Other Reactions to Possible US Courses of Action with Respect to Berlin," dated 11 July 1961, TOP SECRET, Limited Distribution.

[3] SNIE 12.4-61, "Stability of East Germany in a Berlin Crisis," dated 15 August 1961, SECRET.

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substantial, their main domestic efforts would probably be in the direction of menace and intimidation. They would alert and deploy their own forces in East Germany, as well as those of the GDR, and the public would be warned of the regime's determination to react with speed and vigor to hostile manifestations. Additionally, they would probably make available additional supplies of consumer goods in order to relieve economic shortages.

10. Popular dissatisfaction with internal political and economic conditions would be the basic cause of mass unrest. However, the Communist efforts to consolidate the GDR as a separate German state by isolating it from further contact with the West, combined with the international tension generated by Communist pressures against West Berlin, are adding to popular unrest. Thus, there is a relationship between the degree of unrest in East Germany and Moscow's pursuit of its policies aimed at neutralizing West Berlin and fixing the division of Germany, particularly since the 13 August action has deprived the East German regime of a safety valve.

11. Even so, we see little chance that the USSR, if it believed that an East German rising was likely, would respond by altering its principal aims or policies with respect to Berlin. While it is possible that the Soviets might temporarily modify their tactics or extend their timing to reduce the likelihood of a serious German uprising, we think it unlikely that such a Soviet response would be either very significant or lasting. Moreover, we believe that it would be next to impossible to convince the USSR, the GDR, or the East German people that the West intended or had the capability to support widespread anti-regime activities.

12. We believe that the Communists will act speedily and firmly in meeting evidences of public disorder, if these actually develop, in East Germany in the months ahead. If an uprising should occur, they would regard themselves as having no other choice than to put it down, despite the cost to their position and the danger of Western involvement. In the wake of such a repression, the Soviets might accelerate their moves toward a separate peace treaty, believing that it was unprofitable to spend further time in cultivating world opinion or waiting for East-West talks, and that an early treaty would start the process of rebuilding East German sovereignty and authority.

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